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**From:** Vela, Austin  
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<http://www.canoeKayak.com/news/environment/animas-river-reopens-after-gold-king-spill/#AgtBER6ldziKsYd3.97>

# ANIMAS RIVER REOPENS AFTER GOLD KING MINE SPILL

## DURANGO COMMUNITY RALLIES FOR RIVER CELEBRATION

Read more at <http://www.canoeKayak.com/news/environment/animas-river-reopens-after-gold-king-spill/#vQEsfLLLb9XVUVoi.99>

August 19, 2015 By [CanoeKayak.com](http://www.CanoeKayak.com)

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**Words by Malia Durbano**  
**Photos by Esperanza Vigil**

image: <http://stwww.canoeKayak.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/variety-of-river-vehicles.jpg>



In true Durango, Colo., style, the river rats came with hard shells, duckies, rafts, SUPs, inner-tubes and even a Bellyak Tuesday to get back on the Animas River after more than a week of closure. More locals gathered on the bike path nearby to support those heading onto the water.

Local authorities shut down the river on August 6 following the [release of over 3 million of gallons](#) of toxic water from the Gold King Mine near Silverton. On Friday, August 14, EPA officials monitoring the spill announced that potentially harmful metals in the river had returned to “pre-incident” levels, and Tuesday’s event was organized to celebrate the river’s reopening with an mass paddle down through town.

4Corners raft guide Jonathan Wilson has been checking on the river from the trail that borders it since the incident occurred. “It still has a lot of yellow, but the color has come back and visibility is good. We’re now looking forward to next season.”

The spill was a major blow to the local river economy. One rafting outfitter, Flexible Flyers, reported they'd been on track to have their best season since 1982 before the river closure.

image: <http://stwww.canoekayak.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Mild-to-Wild-Bus-rafts.jpg>



Mild to Wild Rafting showed up with a bus load of 21 to take on the maiden voyage. Their passengers included Mayor Dean Brookie, Mayor Pro-Tem Christina Rinderle, and city council members Dick White and Keith Brant. Council members Sweetie Marbury and Gwen Lachelt looked down on the boat parade from their bikes.

Rinderle exclaimed, "I love seeing the community come together like this in true Durango style! The pH levels and mineral content are back to pre-event levels. We're all excited to get back on the river."

Newly appointed Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry for the State of Colorado, Luis Benitez, was in town, "To help celebrate the solution," he said. "There are tons of mines all over the area and this has brought attention to a long-standing concern. We have to pay attention to it in a constructive way. The community has rallied. This is an important commodity for this community and without the commodity there is no industry." He jumped on his SUP and floated off.

image: <http://stwww.canoekayak.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/big-rafts-boats-in-water.jpg>



Tom Barney of Osprey Packs, a local back-packing company, was here to, "Support the re-engagement of our river. It's great to have it back. We appreciate it even more now that we've lost it for just a short time."

Nathan Hammond and his buddy Luke Prince, donned head-to-toe in white protective suits, weren't taking any chances. "The river looks good, but if you go to the eddy area down by the high school and put your foot down, a huge orange plume comes out." It wouldn't be a boat parade in Durango without at least a few people in costume.

The community event was organized by 4Corners Whitewater and 4Corners Riversports. Co-owner Andy Corra bellowed on a megaphone to the crowd of almost 200, "The River is still a little sick – be gentle with her. Show the world we love our river. Use this event to draw attention to the need to fix this problem once and for all." And with that – the flotilla shoved off down the river.

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